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THE BRITISH ACADEMY

THE SCHWEICH LECTURES ON
BIBLICAL ARCHÆOLOGY

‘THE TEXT OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT’

BY

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SUMMARY OF LECTURES

LECTURE I

THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ACCORDING TO HIGHER CRITICISM

THE rise of archæology has considerably modified our views as to the origin of the nations of antiquity. As regards Israel the two important discoveries, the Tel el Amarna tablets and the Elephantine papyri, have been made in Egypt. These discoveries have a literary character; but the influence of Israel in the world is due to its books, from which its history has to be reconstructed.

At the outset we meet with two contrary conceptions: tradition and Higher Criticism. We should like to judge Higher Criticism on its own merits, not taking the apologetic side of tradition. Our guide will be the late American divine, Dr. Briggs, an enthusiastic advocate of Higher Criticism. This system maintains that the whole literature of the Old Testament is a collection of books, the great majority of which are anonymous or pseudonymous. Five only may be considered as the product of one mind, as an organic whole. Common sense cannot easily accept such a description of a whole literature.

Higher Criticism began with Astruc, but was founded by Eichhorn. It consists of two parts: a negative and a positive one. The destructive element is the dominant one. But we shall look here at the constructive side, following the principles and methods of the critics.—Taking Genesis as example, we find that it is said to consist of 260 fragments coming from six different authors.—Description of part of ch. xlviii such as it is taken to pieces by the critics.—Lines of evidence upon which the Higher Critics rely: the writing must be in accordance with its supposed historical position as to time, place, and circumstances.—No historical evidence about the six supposed authors of Genesis. The priestly code, according to Prof. Skinner, is the work of a school of juristic writers the date of which is between 444 and 432. There are no historical proofs of the existence of that school; it is a literary creation. If the laws contained in the code are to regulate the worship of post-exilic Jews, why do they centre on the tabernacle and the ark, and not on the temple, which is not even mentioned? They are not in accordance with the time to which they are attributed; and it is extraordinary that they ignore Deuteronomy.

One cannot admit that the Jahvist and Elohist writers should have entirely disappeared as independent writers; besides, they could not have the information about Joseph which is found in Genesis; their historical position is not in accordance with circumstances.

If we take the redactor of Genesis, where did he find the authority to speak as he does? The post-exilic Jews would not have believed such a description of the past and the promises made to Abraham, which were completely baffled. He was not a prophet nor a lawgiver. Time and author are not appropriate to the composition of a book like Genesis.

Deuteronomy.—The critics are unanimous in stating that it was the book found by Hilkiah in the temple. One cannot but apply to the Deuteronomy of the critics the name of a forgery. If, according to Dr. Driver, the author reproduced faithfully old laws, why should his statement not be correct when he says that they are the laws of Moses? The name of Moses, if he was the man described by the critics, would not have appealed to post-exilic Jews; it had no authority with them.

Let us in one instance put side by side Higher Criticism and tradition. The second and third chapters of Genesis, containing the narrative of the creation of mankind, are said to be Jahvist, and since God is called there Jahveh Elohim, the latter name is a late addition. Tradition says that the three first chapters are the work of Moses. In the first he names Elohim alone; in the second and third, Jahveh Elohim. Jahveh Elohim is one God. Thus these two words teach us that from the first moment of man's existence his God was Jahveh Elohim. The double name is necessary in the narrative of the creation of man. In the next lecture we shall inquire what was the original form of the text of the Old Testament.

LECTURE II

BABYLONIAN CUNEIFORM AND THE CANAANITE SCRIPT

Moses is the first author in the Old Testament. Tradition attributes to him the whole of the Pentateuch. The generally received opinion is that it was written in Hebrew, not in the square Hebrew character, but with the Canaanite alphabet called Old Hebrew. To test the value of this idea we are obliged to go back to the origin of the people of Israel.

Abraham left Haran at God's command, which means for a religious motive. We know now the state of Mesopotamia at that time. As far back as we can go the country was divided between two races, the Semitic Akkadians in the North and the non-Semitic Sumerians in the South. In the first half of the third millennium Sargon of Agada conquered the country as far as the Persian Gulf, and also the land of the Amurru Syria and Palestine. Two hundred years afterwards there was a Sumerian reaction, brought by the dynasty of Ur, but the Elamite conquerors put an end to it. Their successors were the kings of Isin, under the last of whom the Western Semites succeeded in establishing a Semitic dynasty, after which the racial character of Babylonia became predominantly Semitic. The son and successor of the king who put an end to the dynasty of Isin was Hammurabi, the Amraphel of Genesis.

The date of Abraham is given by ch. xiv of Genesis. Abraham was contemporary with Hammurabi. He left a country the literary language of which was Babylonian cuneiform, written on clay tablets. He probably had his religious books, which he took with him. He may have had in his retinue a man who could write and who kept records of his master's dealings with his neighbours. The difference between written literary language and spoken dialects has to be considered. Coming from Haran Abraham spoke a Semitic dialect which differed but little from the dialect or dialects of Palestine. The literary language of Canaan was Babylonian cuneiform as in the whole of Western Asia; we know it from the tablets of Tel el Amarna and from the discoveries at Boghazkeui. Moses, a Semite in Egypt, must have known the dialect of his countrymen and the written language in which Pharaoh corresponded with the governors of the cities of Palestine and the kings of Mesopotamia. He wrote Babylonian cuneiform, for at that time there was no other literary language in Western Asia, and for that he could use only clay tablets.

Objections against this statement.—Character of books written on clay tablets. If Moses had tablets brought by Abraham from Mesopotamia, he re-wrote them.

The books of the Pentateuch are therefore not original documents; they have passed through two changes in language and script. They were first written in cuneiform, and this fact upsets the critical system. The universally received opinion is that the Old Testament was written in Canaanite or Phoenician script, called Old Hebrew,

and that about the date of the Christian era it was changed into square Hebrew. This is a mere hypothesis of which there is no historical proof. Sir Arthur Evans has discovered that the Canaanite alphabet came from Crete; it was first introduced in the settlements on the coast, and reached Canaan with the conquering Philistines. Tyre and Sidon became powerful naval cities after they had received colonies of Minoans. The Phoenician alphabet may have penetrated into Canaan in Hiram's time, when the temple was constructed: of this we have no positive proof, while we know by the ostraca found in Samaria that it was the writing of the court of Ahab and Jezebel, a Phoenician court. It could not be the script of the religious books of the Hebrews. The stone of Mesha has the script of the conquerors of the kingdom of Moab. The inscription of Siloah describes a work done by Phoenician workmen. The name of Old Hebrew has to be dropped in reference to the Canaanite and Phoenician script.

LECTURE III

ARAMAIC AND HEBREW

Prophecy of Isaiah (xix. 18) about five cities in Egypt speaking the language of Canaan. The Elephantine papyri show that the language of the cities of Egypt was Aramaic. The plain interpretation of Isaiah's passage is therefore that Aramaic was the language of Canaan. There were several dialects in Palestine. Jehudith Jewish was the popular dialect of Jerusalem and Judah, as we know from the message of Rabshakeh to the people on the wall at Jerusalem and from Nehemiah.—Nature of popular dialects described from examples taken in Switzerland.—The passage of Isaiah shows that Jehudith was not the language of Canaan.

The Jews were settled in Egypt long before the Persian conquest. They brought from their country their language, which the papyri show to have been Aramaic, and their cult. Aramaic had superseded as written language Babylonian cuneiform. It was used by the ethnic group called Arameans.—Examples of Aramaic being used parallel with cuneiform.—The conclusion derived from these facts is that the prophets wrote in Aramaic.

The generally received opinion is that they wrote in Hebrew. What is Hebrew? This name is not found in the Old Testament, which mentions only Jehudith, Jewish which is the dialect of Jerusalem, and the language of Canaan, Aramaic. What was the script used by the prophets? Canaanite, we saw, was a foreign

alphabet which became that of Samaria and of the Samaritan Pentateuch. If it had been the script of the prophets, what reason was there for changing it for square Hebrew?

The name read Jahveh is Aramaic. We see it in the proper names. This name was not unspeakable. This prohibition originates possibly with the Alexandrian synagogue. We do not know when Aramaic was first written and where, probably in Mesopotamia. Cuneiform was still used for religious books in Solomon's time, who deposited a copy of Deuteronomy in the foundations of the temple.—Objections against the idea that it was in cuneiform.

The Law of Moses was turned into Aramaic by Ezra, 'the ready scribe'. The Law was to him the Law of Moses, as it had already been before to Zerubbabel.—Statement of Edward Meyer about Ezra.—Ezra was also a teacher; it was necessary for him to turn the cuneiform tablets into Aramaic. This work was in conformity with the usual work and training of Mesopotamian scribes. The Law was possibly preserved in one of the large libraries of which considerable remains have been discovered. He may have divided it into five books. The people of Jerusalem must have recognized the authority of the Law of Moses. Reading of the Law under Nehemiah. It was interpreted by the Levites. In the prayer are quoted all the components of the Pentateuch assigned by the critics to a later date. After Ezra all the books of the Old Testament existing in his time must have been in Aramaic. Ezra, who revived the Mosaic Law, may be considered the second legislator.

The translation of the LXX was made from an Aramaic text.

How did Aramaic become the language written with the square Hebrew? This script dates from the Christian era. It is derived from Aramaic. The Jews who returned from the Captivity were only men of Judah and Benjamin: Jerusalem became more and more important; their sacred books had to become Jewish. The rabbis or the scribes made a literary language of Jewish by adapting to it a script, the square Hebrew. The Hebrew of the Bible is the Jehudith, the language of Jerusalem put in writing.



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